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Rights of indigenous peoples

Status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 40/131.

* A/69/150.

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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples

Summary

The present report on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 40/131. It provides updated information on the activities of the Fund since the submission of the previous biennial report (A/67/221), including on the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh annual sessions of the Board of Trustees, held in 2013 and 2014, respectively. It also reports on the outcome of the intersessional meetings of the Board, a working method established to respond to the expansion of the mandate of the Fund to sessions of human rights treaty bodies and of the Human Rights Council.

I. Mandate of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples

1. The initial mandate of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 40/131, was to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations by providing them with financial assistance, funded by means of voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities.

2. Over the past 29 years, the mandate of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples has been expanded six times, giving the opportunity to indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of other human rights mechanisms and to contribute to important developments on indigenous issues that take place at the international level.

3. The first expansion of the Fund occurred in December 1995 (see General Assembly resolution 50/156) and made it possible for indigenous communities and organizations to participate in the deliberations of the open-ended intersessional working group of the Commission on Human Rights to elaborate a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. As a result, around 130 specialized indigenous activists received financial support from the Fund to attend sessions on the draft declaration, thus contributing to this major standard-setting exercise, which culminated in the adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (resolution 61/295, annex) on 13 September 2007.

4. The mandate of the Fund was further expanded following the creation by the Commission on Human Rights (in its resolution 1998/20, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1998/247) of an open-ended intersessional ad hoc working group to elaborate and consider proposals for the possible establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system. The General Assembly decided, in its resolution 53/130, that the Fund should also be used to assist indigenous representatives in participating in the deliberations of the ad hoc working group. The Fund subsequently allocated grants to some 50 indigenous representatives to attend meetings of the group.

5. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2000/22, established the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as a subsidiary organ of the Council. Subsequent to this development, the General Assembly decided, in its resolution 56/140, that the Fund should also be used to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations in attending the sessions of the Permanent Forum as observers.

6. In its resolution 63/161, the General Assembly expanded the mandate of the Fund so as to facilitate the participation of representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations in the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, established as a subsidiary organ of the Human Rights Council in accordance with its resolution 6/36.

7. In its resolution 65/198, the General Assembly further expanded the mandate of the Fund in order to facilitate the participation of representatives of indigenous

peoples' organizations and communities in sessions of the Human Rights Council and of human rights treaty bodies.

8. In September 2012, the General Assembly, in its resolution 66/296, expanded the mandate of the Fund to include support for representatives of indigenous peoples, organizations, institutions and communities to participate in the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to be held in 2014, as well as in the preparatory process for the Conference.

9. In December 2013, the General Assembly, in its resolution 68/149, changed the name of the Fund from "United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations" to "United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples". This symbolic but highly significant move better reflects the status and rights of those who benefit from the work of the Fund.

II. Administration of the Fund and composition of the Board of Trustees

10. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 40/131, the Fund is administered by the Secretary-General, in accordance with the relevant financial rules and regulations of the United Nations on general trust funds for humanitarian assistance, and with the advice of a Board of Trustees. The recommendations of the Board are approved by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on behalf of the Secretary-General. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) acts as the secretariat of the Fund and the Board.

11. The Board of Trustees is composed of five persons with relevant experience on issues affecting indigenous peoples, who serve in their personal capacity as United Nations experts. The Board members are appointed by the Secretary-General for a three-year renewable term.

12. The current Board members appointed by the Secretary-General for the period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2014 are Kenneth Deer (Canada), Shankar Limbu (Nepal), Dalee Sambo Dorough (United States of America), Legborsi Saro Pyagbara (Nigeria) and Joenia Batista de Carvalho (Brazil).

III. Grant cycle

A. Meetings of the Board of Trustees

13. The Board of Trustees has adapted its working methods in order to respond to the new challenges arising from the expansion of the mandate of the Fund. To this end, five calls, tailored around the sessions of the different mechanisms, are launched throughout the year. In addition to its annual sessions, the Board has established a system of intersessional meetings organized by e-mail to decide on the allocation of grants to indigenous peoples' organizations and communities that wish to participate in sessions of the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review mechanism, and the human rights treaty bodies. Intersessional meetings are usually held in May, August and November of each calendar year.

B. Admissibility of new applications and selection process

14. The criteria for the selection of beneficiaries have been established by the General Assembly, as well as by the Secretary-General upon the recommendation of the Board of Trustees. The Board has also formulated additional criteria for the selection of beneficiaries attending the sessions of the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review, and the human rights treaty bodies, taking into account the specific accreditation and attendance rules that apply to the work of those bodies and mechanisms.

15. Indigenous women, youth and persons with disabilities are strongly encouraged to apply for funding. In this regard, it is important to note that application and evaluation forms and calls for applications, all available in English, French and Spanish, are also available in a format accessible to indigenous persons with disabilities.

16. In applying the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries, members of the Board ensure geographical, gender and age balance as much as possible. Priority is also given to regions underrepresented in the sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Decisions are taken on the basis of the level of available contributions.

17. In addition, the secretariat reviews all the recommendations of the Board for consistency with relevant United Nations administrative and financial rules and regulations. The High Commissioner approves, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the recommendations made at the annual session of the Board.

18. Approved travel grants include a round-trip air ticket in economy class from the beneficiary's home town to Geneva or New York and a daily subsistence allowance for the days of the session, which he or she receives upon arrival in Geneva or New York.

C. Monitoring and evaluation of grants

19. The attendance and contributions of the beneficiaries of the Fund during the sessions of the Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism are closely monitored. Moreover, beneficiaries are requested to provide a copy of any statement delivered as part of their reporting obligations and to complete questionnaires on their participation and follow-up activities upon return to their respective home countries. The secretariat of the Fund maintains a daily attendance sheet of the grantees.

20. At its annual session, the Board of Trustees reviews the status of all travel grants allocated in previous years, as well as the reports containing the secretariat's analysis of the questionnaires submitted by beneficiaries on their participation and follow-up activities. The Board does not consider applications from previous beneficiaries of the Fund who failed to submit their evaluation forms.

21. The Board of Trustees and the secretariat of the Fund each send a representative to the sessions of the Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism to meet with and provide support to all beneficiaries present, including by contributing to their training, and to assess the impact of their participation on the deliberations at the sessions.

IV. Twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh annual meetings of the Board of Trustees

22. The Board of Trustees held its twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh annual meetings from 11 to 15 February 2013 and from 17 to 21 February 2014, respectively.

23. During the meetings, the Board of Trustees reviewed the implementation of the recommendations adopted during its previous sessions and examined information prepared by the secretariat, in particular relating to the extension of the mandate of the Fund, policy issues, capacity-building of indigenous peoples, fundraising efforts and the financial situation of the Fund, including contributions received or pledges made. It decided to allocate grants to indigenous representatives wishing to participate in meetings of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review, and the human rights treaty bodies.

24. In addition, the Board of Trustees met with representatives of Member States during two donor meetings that were organized during the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh annual sessions. Board members expressed their gratitude to the donor States (see para. 50) for their generous contributions to the Fund and appealed for increasing support from Governments and other donors.

25. The recommendations made by the Board of Trustees during the two annual meetings, as well as during the intersessional virtual meetings, were approved on 13 March 2013 and on 17 March 2014 by the High Commissioner on behalf of the Secretary-General.

A. Recommendations for grants at the twenty-sixth session of the Board of Trustees

26. During its twenty-sixth annual session, the Board considered more than 260 admissible applications. Having examined the applications in the light of the selection criteria, the Board recommended the following for approval by the Secretary-General: 27 grants for representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend the twelfth session of the Permanent Forum; 20 grants for representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend the sixth session of the Expert Mechanism; 4 grants for representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend the sixteenth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review; 1 grant for a representative of an indigenous organization to attend the 108th session of the Human Rights Committee and 3 grants for indigenous representatives to attend the ninth session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

27. Furthermore, the Board set aside a budget to enable representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend the sessions of the Human Rights Council, human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms held between September 2013 and March 2014.

28. The Board made the following recommendations during the three intersessional meetings held in May, August and December 2013: six grants for the participation of indigenous representatives in the twenty-third to twenty-fifth sessions of the Human Rights Council; three grants for representatives of

indigenous communities and organizations to attend the seventeenth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review; two grants for the participation of an indigenous representative in the fifty-fifth and fifty-sixth sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; one grant for the participation of an indigenous representative in the eighty-third session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; one grant for the participation of an indigenous representative in the tenth session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and six grants for the participation of indigenous representatives in the 109th and 110th sessions of the Human Rights Committee.

B. Recommendations for grants at the twenty-seventh session of the Board of Trustees

29. During its twenty-seventh annual session, the Board considered more than 265 admissible applications. A total of 25 grants were allocated to support the participation of representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations and communities in the twelfth session of the Permanent Forum; 20 grants for representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend the fifth session of the Expert Mechanism; 1 grant for a representative of an indigenous organization to attend the sixty-sixth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child; and 2 grants for indigenous representatives to attend the eleventh session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

30. The Board also decided to set aside a budget to allocate, through intersessional meetings, grants for sessions of the human rights treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review, scheduled from July 2014 to March 2015. In 2014, one intersessional virtual meeting was held in May. The Board of Trustees allocated one grant for the participation of an indigenous peoples' organization in the 58th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and five grants for participation in the eighty-fifth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Two more intersessional virtual meetings will be held in August and November 2014.

V. Expansion of the mandate of the Fund to support the participation of indigenous peoples in the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

31. In September 2012, the General Assembly, in its resolution 66/296, expanded the mandate of the Fund to include support for indigenous peoples to participate in the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to be held in 2014, as well as in the preparatory process for the Conference.

32. The members of the Board discussed the implications of the expansion of the Fund's mandate and expressed their concern at the limited staff resources available to handle an increase in the workload generated by the expansion. The Board expressed its concern as to the impact that this may have on the capacity of the Board to fulfil its mandate. The Fund received earmarked funding from Denmark,

New Zealand, Norway and Sweden to support the participation of indigenous representatives of all regions in the meetings.

33. In accordance with resolution 66/296, the Board recommended the following for approval by the Secretary-General:

(a) A total of 21 grants for representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend the interactive hearing held in June 2014 pursuant to resolution 66/296 on the organization of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples;

(b) A total of 84 grants for representatives of indigenous communities and organizations to attend the World Conference.

34. The Board also recommended that the grants be divided equally among the seven indigenous regions and that the indigenous regions take into consideration representatives of the youth and women caucuses, as well as persons with disabilities, in their selection.

VI. Other recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees

A. Follow-up activities

35. The Board of Trustees recommended that, whenever possible, beneficiaries of the Fund contact the OHCHR field presences and the United Nations Development Programme to seek assistance and explore cooperation opportunities, including for follow-up activities in relation to the implementation of the recommendations of the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review mechanism and the special procedures, and the human rights treaty bodies.

36. Moreover, the Board emphasized that promoting linkages between indigenous peoples' organizations and field presences could facilitate the integration of indigenous issues in the work of OHCHR. In addition, the Board suggested that collaboration between OHCHR field representation and beneficiaries of the Fund be strengthened with a view to better raising awareness of and implementing the principles contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

B. Capacity-building and training

37. The Board members continued to emphasize the need to increase efforts to build the capacity of indigenous representatives to effectively participate in and contribute to sessions of the human rights mechanisms. The Board held extensive discussions on the means to maximize the preparation, participation and follow-up activities of beneficiaries attending the sessions of the human rights mechanisms, as well as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. One way that the Fund is trying to achieve this aim is through an ongoing collaboration with the University of Arizona to prepare a practical guide for indigenous peoples. This new tool is aimed at assisting indigenous peoples in better understanding United Nations human rights

mechanisms and becoming adequately prepared to successfully advocate for their rights at the international level.

38. In addition to providing financial support to enable the participation of indigenous peoples in United Nations meetings, the Fund employs resources to build the capacity of indigenous peoples to make them truly effective participants in those meetings. For example, during the reporting period, the Fund organized, in partnership with the Indigenous Peoples' Centre for Documentation, Research and Information, eight human rights training modules in four languages in Geneva and New York to increase the capacity of indigenous peoples' representatives to effectively participate in the human rights mechanisms.

39. Moreover, in cooperation with non-governmental organization partners based in Geneva, the Fund provided assistance to indigenous peoples' representatives in targeting their advocacy, making constructive interventions tailored to each United Nations event and contributing to the implementation of the recommendations made by human rights mechanisms and those contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the national level.

C. Information sharing and collaboration with other human rights mechanisms

40. The Board of Trustees recommended that either the Chair or another member of the Board continue to represent the Board at sessions of the Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism and attend the sessions of the Human Rights Council at which indigenous peoples' issues are addressed to give an update on the implementation of the mandate of the Fund and other developments.

41. The Board welcomed the constant collaborative efforts made by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the Permanent Forum and the Expert Mechanism to appeal to States and other interested parties to contribute financially to support the work of the Fund, as well as to help to disseminate information on the activities of the Fund to their respective indigenous networks.

42. The Board continues to welcome the practice, established by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, of holding meetings with the beneficiaries of the Fund in parallel to the sessions of the Expert Mechanism and the Permanent Forum and recommended that the secretariat of the Fund continue to play an active role in disseminating information to grantees wishing to send information to or communicate with the Special Rapporteur.

43. The extension of the mandate of the Fund to cover the sessions of the human rights mechanisms has allowed indigenous peoples to engage actively to bring indigenous peoples' issues and perspectives into the work of human rights bodies. The work of the Fund has already helped to heighten the profile of indigenous peoples' issues in the work and findings of those bodies.

44. Furthermore, the Board met with members of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to discuss ways to improve the participation of indigenous peoples in the sessions of the Committee. The members of the Board extended their admiration and support to the work that the Committee has undertaken to empower indigenous peoples worldwide.

45. In addition, during the ninth and eleventh sessions of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Fund organized, in collaboration with the International Disability Alliance, two side events on the situation of indigenous women with disabilities and on advancing the rights of indigenous persons with disabilities in the light of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Grantees of the Fund participated in both side events, and the insights and information that they had brought to the discussions were very much welcomed by members of the treaty body and others concerned.

VII. Financial status of the Fund and contributions received

46. The Fund is funded by means of voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities. In order to respond to increasing demands to operate and fulfil its mandate in a satisfactory manner, the Fund needs to be supported on a regular basis.

47. Since the creation of the Fund in 1985, its mandate has been expanded six times in response to developments and the changing realities of the United Nations system and indigenous peoples. The Board and the secretariat have reacted immediately to those new challenges so as to enable indigenous peoples to benefit from each new mandate, with the support of donors. Over the years, the General Assembly and the regular donors to the Fund have viewed the Fund as an important tool in providing assistance to indigenous peoples and have recognized the accomplishments of its Board in carrying out this task.

48. The Board can allocate travel grants on the basis of the contributions paid and duly registered by the United Nations Treasurer, as well as any balance remaining from previous years, as established by the United Nations Office at Geneva.

49. Although the level of contributions received in 2013 and 2014 increased compared with the previous years, the uncertainty about future contributions continues to affect the delivery of the mandate of the Fund. The Board hopes that the injection of funds received in the past years will be sustained beyond the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

50. The table below indicates the contributions received from States for the period from January 2012 to June 2014:

Contributions received from States (January 2012-June 2014)
(United States dollars)

Contributor	*Amount*	*Year of receipt*
Algeria	5 000	2014
Argentina	10 000	2012
	10 000	2013
	15 000	2014
Australia	98 640	2012
	95 150	2013
Chile	5 000	2012
	5 000	2013
	5 000	2014

Contributor	*Amount*	*Year of receipt*
Cyprus	4 047	2012
Denmark	231 225	2014
Estonia	9 191	2012
	10 430	2013
Finland	25 740	2012
	26 490	2013
	27 174	2014
Germany	46 481	2012
Holy See	1 500	2013
	1 417	2014
Mexico	24 188	2012
	26 139	2013
	26 355	2014
Norway	205 692	2012
	146 026	2013
	150 150	2014
Peru	5 000	2013
Saudi Arabia	20 000	2012
Spain	2 586	2012
	20 690	2013
Sweden	100 000	2012
Turkey	10 000	2013
	10 000	2014
Total	**1 379 311**	

51. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities can contribute to the Fund. Information on how to contribute can be obtained from the secretariat at: United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, or by e-mail: indigenousfunds@ohchr.org.

VIII. Recommendations

52. **The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples has continued to provide important support to the participation of indigenous representatives in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and in the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The expansion of the mandate has further increased the potential of the Fund, as it can now also support indigenous participation in the Human Rights Council and the human rights treaty bodies, as well as in the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.**

53. **In order to bolster this ongoing work, it is imperative that the Fund receive increasing support from Governments and other donors. Although the level of contributions received in 2013 and 2014 increased compared with the previous years, it is imperative that the Fund receive sustained and increasing support from Governments and other donors in the future in order to fulfil its mandate in a satisfactory manner in the light of increasing demands.**

54. **After assessing the present financial needs of the Fund, the Board of Trustees of the Fund recommended a target of $1.4 million for the biennium 2014-2015. This amount will allow the Board to meet one third of the requests for funding that it currently receives.**

55. **In order to successfully advance the human rights of indigenous peoples, it is important to ensure the continued participation of those most directly affected. The Fund plays an essential role in that sense. The year 2015 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Fund, which calls for a celebration of the Fund's history and positive impact on United Nations processes to effectively ensure the promotion and protection of the human rights of indigenous peoples.**